



Celebrating Food, Art & Culture

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It's the Prima Donna of Protein

Going Native at Mount Rushmore

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The International Council of Thirteen Indigenous Grandmothers with the Dalai Lama in Dharamsala, India.

Thirteen Grandmothers

Who Make More Than Cookies

They travel the world together, laugh effortlessly and enjoy the easy camaraderie of elderly women who have much in common. All have a stillness in their nature that begets respect. Yet, their business is critical, and they aren't afraid of confrontation. Just earlier this year, they were nearly removed from the grounds at St. Peter's Basilica where they had hoped to speak with the pope about 15th-century papal bulls supporting colonialism and its consequences for indigenous people. The flap ended with the women being cordially invited inside to rest and pray.

Their time is carefully managed, but not by BlackBerry devices or wi-fied laptops. In one way or another, most of these women work in health care. They straddle two worlds, working together to help one world heal the other. They are known as the International Council of Thirteen Indigenous Grandmothers, and their ceremonies, activities, fund-raising and awareness work centers on the following mission: "We, the International Council of Thirteen Indigenous Grandmothers, represent a global alliance of prayer, education and healing for our Mother Earth, all Her inhabitants, all the children, and for the next seven generations to come."

In the world's indigenous cultures, grandmothers — the women elders — traditionally hold an honored position. Guardians of the physical and spiritual survival of their families, they are the tribe's caretakers. They are the keepers of the teachings and rituals that allowed the tribes to flourish for centuries, and they uphold the social order. In tribes around the world, the Council of Grandmothers has been consulted before any major decision, including whether to go to war. Today, these 13 grandmothers work in fulfillment of an ancient prophecy, foretold by many of the world's indigenous tribes. "When the grandmothers from the four directions speak, a new time is coming," so the prophecy goes.

Their first gathering in 2004 — an unprecedented event joining these spiritual leaders from the Arctic Circle; Asia; Africa; and North, Central and South America — took place in the Catskill Mountains, New York, home of the great Iroquois Nation. As one of the women, a Yupik doctor from Alaska, introduced herself, she handed out 13 stones and 13 eagle feathers that had been given to her by her great-grandmother when she was 9 years old. The old woman had said that her great-granddaughter would be part of a council of grandmothers and that she was to distribute the feathers and stones when they met.

Though they each work as individuals as healers and leaders in their communities, the whole group meets semi-annually for a Council Gathering, taking turns hosting one another to learn more about one another's cultures and the needs in their regions. They also travel individually and in small groups on behalf of the whole. They sponsor 16 projects in six countries. During a council meeting in Dharamsala, India, the women had a private audience with the Dalai Lama, and meetings with other luminaries in the Tibetan religious government in exile.

Just last month, the women joined in front of the White House to participate in a Drum Gathering for Peace. Next year, these leaders will gather for events in Oregon, Canada, New York and Arizona. And though the group's oldest member is 84, its Council Gathering schedule is set through 2013, with trips to Brazil, Africa, Alaska, Japan, Nepal, New Zealand and Sweden.

Rocket Man

It used to be that Commander John Herrington, a member of the Chickasaw Nation, would race around Earth fueled by rocket propellant. Today he's rocketing across the U.S. to stoke interest in learning. Since retiring from his day job as an astronaut, Herrington has been passionate about igniting kids' interest in math, science, engineering and technology. He accomplishes just that with Rocketrek, a 4,000-mile, coast-to-coast bike journey. Herrington began pedaling in Cape Flattery on Washington's Olympic Peninsula on Aug. 13, and he is scheduled to wrap up his trek at Cape Canaveral in Florida this month, in time to see his friend fly the next shuttle mission.

Herrington's space journey is as interesting as his bike journey. A love affair with rock climbing led him to drop out of college his freshman year, and take a job rock climbing Colorado as part of a survey crew. Hanging from cliffs, he could see mathematics, specifically trigonometry, in practice, and it intrigued him. The owner of the surveying company took an interest in Herrington, and urged him to go back to school to earn his degree. Fortunately, Herrington took heed. During his senior year of college, he met a retired Navy captain who suggested he should join the Navy and become a naval aviator. Again, Herrington took the advice. He credits the counsel of these two men with turning his life around and launching his career in space.



Photo courtesy of John Jernigan, © 2008

With Rocketrek, Herrington hopes to do the same for children who aren't aware of their potential and opportunities. He's speaking at NASA Explorer schools and Indian reservations along his route, to inspire kids to learn more about how they can apply their interests to their educations, and plot a path to a career they love. His Rocketrek Web site includes a blog about the miles traveled by both his bike and his mind, and he posts math puzzles related to the trip. He blogs, "Dreams do come true, but only if you let them! If you believe in yourself and believe in those that believe in you, anything is possible."

Splendor in the Glass

Masters of a New Media

“You’re turning, turning. Softly. OK, stop. Blow. Stand by in three, two, one. Torch it!” Dancing? Cooking? No, but to artists, glass-blowing is as choreographed as a dance and demands the precision timing of a chef preparing crème brûlée.

Glass might be a new artistic medium for Native artists, but many have proven very adept at meeting its technical challenges and the artistic expression it lends itself to, creating astounding works of beauty and complexity. Here are a few American Indian masters of a new media.

Tarpley carving with a sandblaster. Photos courtesy Kiva Fine Arts.



C.S. Tarpley

C.S. Tarpley (Choctaw/Chickasaw/Cherokee) originally emphasized glass designs featuring universal iconography and motifs found in many cultures. However, his present collaboration with Santa Clara Pueblo potter Nathan Youngblood features designs specific to Santa Clara Pueblo. “Nathan uses designs that were handed down to him from his grandmother,” Tarpley explains. “Although these designs are ancient in nature, Nathan has managed to adapt them to reflect his own love of the contemporary and universal. Rather than breaking with tradition, Nathan has simply brought tradition along with him.”

The collaboration begins with Tarpley blowing the glass shape. He then takes this “blank” and covers it with a rubber stencil material. Youngblood then draws his designs directly onto the rubber. Once the design is drawn and the stencil is cut away where the glass is carved, Tarpley spends several days cutting deeply into the glass with a sandblaster.

Marvin Oliver

What is first apparent about the glasswork of Marvin Oliver (Quinault/Isleta Pueblo) is its immense scale. Oliver’s

7-ton “Orca and Baby,” for instance, in Children’s Hospital in Seattle, measures nearly 30 feet long and 20 feet high. It is pictured on *Unity’s* cover.

Oliver’s enormous glass sculptures have established this University of Washington professor, and curator of contemporary Native American art at the Burke Museum on the university’s campus, as an internationally acclaimed sculptor. “Larger pieces are very calculated works of art,” Oliver notes. They are very predictable, as opposed to my blown-glass pieces, which have an element of spontaneity.”

Oliver’s commitment to art began during the American Indian Movement’s occupation of Alcatraz in 1969. Although the American Indian center on Alcatraz was never realized, Oliver’s contribution to Native art continued, with more than 30 major installations mounted throughout the world today.

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Tear-drop platter by Tarpley/Youngblood.

A Rare Voice Rises in the West

At the International Balloon Fiesta held last month in Albuquerque, one of Native America’s rare operatic voices opened the celebration with a traditional rendering of the national anthem. Ironically, spectators never heard the first note. Although Bonnie Jo Hunt (Sioux) is a superb soprano and has performed internationally during her career, she chose to perform the “Star-Spangled Banner” using Universal American Indian Sign Language. Much like learning to sing operatic arias, she taught herself to sign and explains the cultural importance. “When the Spaniards re-introduced horses to North America, it allowed our nomadic tribes to venture farther and interact with other tribes. So, American Indians created their own sign language in order to communicate and trade,” she says.

Hunt’s journey from the western range to the opera house is quite a story. “One day, my dad and I were traveling in the car, and I heard this very strange tone ... and I thought, ‘Wow, that’s really interesting.’ So I asked him what it was and he said, ‘Oh, you don’t want to hear that.’ And he changed the station saying, ‘That’s opera, and all operas are real boring, and all opera singers are great, big people.’ So I didn’t dare tell him, but I thought, ‘Boy, that’s an interesting sound,’” she explained in a recent interview for National Public Radio.

Hunt learned voice technique on her own and eventually studied music at the University of Montana with the one handicap of not knowing a staff from a clef. “It was very difficult for me because I had an exceptional voice by age 16 but had never paid any attention to written music. I had to actually learn everything about notes and rests at a profound speed,” she shares with a laugh. Hunt’s career went on to include a season at the San Francisco Opera, but she left the formal opera world to travel internationally with her husband, and during that time performed benefit concerts in Lagos, Cairo and other cities throughout Africa.

Today, Hunt is settled back at home in Albuquerque, cutting albums, writing books and donating the proceeds to her own nonprofit that supports children. Her latest album is “Wiyu’ kcan,” which means “contemplation,” and can be purchased from Drumbeat Indian Arts Inc.



This portrait of Bonnie Jo Hunt, titled “On Sacred Ground Series V,” provided courtesy of ORO Fine Art Gallery.

The Journey

Preserving Our Presence Through the Arts

“The Journey” travels through the collections of three American Indian artists who have preserved many aboriginal traditions and beliefs in their work. Although from diverse backgrounds, they share the common bond of storytelling as they pass down their culture from one generation to the next. This journey begins in North Central Saskatchewan with the Ahtahkakoop (“Starblanket”) Band Reserve #104. Here you will find beliefs common to most tribal nations symbolized in paintings — protectors, environmental issues and metamorphosis. Traveling south we arrive in the nation of the Sisseton-Wahpeton Dakota Tribe. Once known as part of “The Great Sioux Nation,” the nation is located in the northeast corner of South Dakota. While visiting, we view traditional dancers and a vital member of the Lewis and Clark Expedition captured in bronze. Continuing southwest into New Mexico, we visit the Diné (Navajo Nation) represented in dream, reality and being. “The Journey” illustrates what the indigenous people of this great nation have known for centuries: There are many means of preserving our presence. Art is one of them.

Arnold Isbister

Being artistic or creative came naturally to Arnold Isbister (Cree) at an early age. He was designated consistently as the classroom artist for curriculum illustrations, and that designation remained throughout high school. His first true introduction to painting began with an oil-painting set given to him as a Father’s Day gift. It sparked a fire within him: Consumed with color, composition and technique, Isbister diligently painted and experimented day after day.

Following 18 months of self-immersion, Isbister applied for a scholarship to attend an art school, and to his surprise was granted one at International Banff Centre of Fine Arts in Regina, Saskatchewan. He later enrolled at the University of Saskatchewan’s fine arts program, but he switched majors and never received his art degree. After graduation, he spent 14 years in psychological services at a penitentiary but while working a graveyard shift, a friend admiring his artwork asked him, “What are you doing in

a place like this? Get out of here and do something with this!” His friend committed suicide a year later, impressing upon Isbister that life is brief. Newly inspired, he dedicated himself to art. Soon Isbister was securing solo exhibitions in Saskatoon, Calgary and Edmonton. His work ventured into abstraction, surrealism and expressionism as inspired by the likes of established artists Tak Tanabe, Graham Coughtry and Mary Ann Bobak.

“Throughout the years, I have searched for a personal style that would best reflect my ideas and feelings. I came to realize that my style is an idea and passion within myself which I render physically,” says Isbister of his work. “My paintings are inspired by different things, such as a dream, a circumstance or traditions.”

These days, Isbister is combining his paintings with short stories to publish books. Writing has become an integral part of his art. He released “Stories Moshum & Kokum Told Me” in June 2005 through Wingate Press.

On this month’s cover of *Unity* is “The



“The Shapeshifter” by Arnold Isbister

Protectors.” Isbister’s dream composition symbolizes owls as protectors that have come to give him a message or warning. Owls, along with loons and crows, can travel between the natural and supernatural worlds. Pictured above is “The Shapeshifter,” an abstract composition that reflects the metamorphosis of a shaman changing shape in ceremony. “I thought this application of paint, style and imagery expresses a spiritual ethereal process the best,” explains Isbister. Pictured at the top of the following page is “War.” The atomic explosion signifies the repercussions of technology, while the “green man” is symbolized by a Native and his regalia of spiritual colors and attire. The painting speaks to Natives’ growing concern with the environment.

Left to right: “Grass Dancer,” “Fancy Dancer” and “Sacagawea” by Janice Albro



Janice Albro

As an enrolled member of the Sisseton-Wahpeton Dakota Nation, Janice Albro (Sioux) resides in Bartlesville, Okla., with her husband. Her tribe is part of what was once called “The Great Sioux Nation.” After retiring early from Phillips Petroleum Co., Albro followed the powwow circuit for several years and began to pursue a love of art as a full-time endeavor. Primarily self-taught, Albro has also studied at the Scottsdale



"War" by Arnold Isbister

Artists School in Arizona and Fechin Institute in New Mexico. Albro's work is well known throughout the Midwest and has won numerous awards. Several of her pieces were exhibited in 1993 at The Institute for American Indian Studies in Washington, Conn. She was named a SWAIA Fellow in 2003 by the Santa Fe Indian Art Market and was awarded an Artists in Business Leadership Fellowship by First Peoples Fund in Rapid City, S.D., in 2005.

Just as intense as her desire to create is Albro's love of dancing. Native dance inspired the series of powerful bronze sculptures pictured on the preceding page. These are works that capture the incredible feeling of being in the sacred circle, dancing to the beat of the drum, which echoes in the heartbeat of a people who have survived more than 500 years. "The inspiration for the work I create comes from participating in the powwow circuit, tribal ceremonies, reading and researching tribal history," explains Albro. "Before our country was industrialized, it was beautiful and pristine and Native Americans lived in close balance with nature. It is my hope that my creations will truly be a reflection of what my grandfather, Eyahotanka, might have envisioned in a time past. I believe American Indian art is an important chapter in the history of this country. It provides beautiful works of art using supplies furnished by nature, including natural dyes of berries and plants, buck brush, honeysuckle and many other environmental items."

"The Grass Dancer" captures one of the oldest surviving tribal dances performed by aboriginals of the north. The regalia features a colorful fringe that replaces the grasses that were originally tucked into the belt. The abundance of fringes and ribbons on the outfit embraces

the graceful movement of the dancer's body as the dancer sways, representing the beautiful long prairie grass blowing in the wind. The dance originated in the North but has migrated south in recent years. "The Fancy Dancer" is inspired by the fastest and fanciest dance among male dancers. The dance originated in Oklahoma, but it is now performed everywhere. The regalia features two bustles, at the top and bottom of the back. The headdress is a porcupine broach topped with one or two eagle feathers mounted in a rocker that moves back and forth to the beat of the drum. "Sacagawea" breaks from the dance theme to immortalize the Shoshone woman who carried her infant son on her back while travelling thousands of wilderness miles up the Missouri River westward to the Pacific Ocean with Lewis and Clark (1804-1806).

Vernon Bigman

"I am a creative person, possessing an internal voice or dialogue with myself, a form of nourishment for the mind, kind of a storytelling about all things," says Vernon Bigman (Navajo). His works featured in this edition of *Unity* (pictured right) are from his Dream Snakes series, compositions that use painting, drawing and digital photography to tell a story of reality and being.

Bigman creates his artwork as a story about life and our environment explained through dreams. He explains, "All of my images are in the imagination of the viewer, a landscape of the psyche, a place in the soul, spirit or inner mind. The reality is that when we are asleep, what we understand to be real is not the same as when we are awake. The two states are, in many ways, two different forms of reality. In Dream Snakes, everything is at play and on the move. Each part has its own job to do, and by doing so, the tale of events unfolds and is discovered — but like a dream, the tale may change later and tell another story."

Describing the importance of fine art to American Indian culture, Bigman believes art is for all of humanity and guides us through life. He points to religious art as one example, others being images of life and ideas, all of which are found in history books, museums, art galleries, painted caves,

electronic media, magazines, etc. "When we see an art object we like or notice, it speaks to us with meaning, value or curiosity," he says. "This in turn gives rise to the growth of humanity. Also, the act of creating art is a paradigm in which we learn to think and build new ideas. As process is repeated, especially among children, more understanding is gained and the better we become at creating abstract concepts like math, philosophy, religion, law ... the meaning of our existence. Art has served to create us and our cultures worldwide."

Bigman currently teaches art at Pratt Institute in Brooklyn, N.Y., where he earned his master of fine arts. His work is in the collections of Austin D. Warburton, Santa Clara, Calif.; the San Francisco Art Institute; the National Museum of the American Indian, Washington, D.C.; and Pratt Institute. His work is exhibited at prestigious galleries across the country, and his story has been told by several newspapers, including The New York Times.

Top to bottom: "Dream Snakes @ the Start of Yin Yang" and "Dream Snakes & the Holy Mountain" by Vernon Bigman



Let's Talk Turkey

... and let's be clear about it: All of the turkey lore stuffed herein is unsubstantiated, but nonetheless tasty morsels of tidbits found in various cookbooks, pantries and campfire legends. So as the big T-Day approaches, here's a little food trivia to gobble down at the table.

Wild turkeys, which are native to northern Mexico and the Eastern United States, were probably first domesticated by the Aztecs. Spaniards returned to Europe with Mexican turkeys in 1519, and within a few years, gobblers were gracing gentry farms and tables.



The wild turkey would have been our national symbol had Ben Franklin had his way. He considered the bird a symbol of courage.

Over the next century, the bird became a popular and important source of protein, so it's natural that the Pilgrims brought a few along on their high-seas adventure. Little did they know that the New World was old news to the boat's avian contingent. Imagine how silly they felt alighting from a harrowing 66-day journey — which could not have been made more lovely by sharing close quarters with a band of large, loud fowl — only to find the new locale teeming with their wild brethren! Unbeknownst to the Pilgrims, the Mayflower ride was simply a kind of homecoming for their feathered shipmates.

Legend has it that the Puritans and approximately 90 Wampanoag Native Americans sat down together for the first Thanksgiving feast in fall 1621. Whether a gobbler was actually on the menu is a point of debate. Though turkey might not have been offered on the famed table of gratitude, there was a well-traveled turkey that made history much later in the New Frontier: When Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin sat down to their first meal on the moon, they opened up foil food packets stuffed with roasted turkey and all of the trimmings. Probably not the way that particular tom would have chosen to make his mark, but we can't always choose our course. (Or in his case, which course he would be.)

Interestingly enough, even though live turkeys survived the miserable hop across the pond with the Puritans, it's likely that only a packaged turkey would be able to withstand the Apollo trip: They have proved themselves quite the faint-hearted fowl. When the Air Force let off a series of sonic booms while conducting test runs on breaking the sound barrier, rafters (flocks) of turkeys in the fields nearby simply dropped dead from the shock, which was bad luck or, one might say, a "bad break" for those frightened fowls.

Speaking of bad breaks, here is another cultural contribution of the old bird. Ever hear of the wishbone? When feasting on this fine, de-feathered specimen, it's traditional for families to search for the turkey's "furcula" (forked clavicle bone) so two people can each pull an end and make a wish. Once the dried bone snaps, the human with the larger piece in hand gets the wish. Voila — the source of the term "lucky break." (Though not for the bone's original owner, of course.)

Did you know our national symbol would have been the wild turkey had Ben Franklin had his way? He considered the bald eagle of bad moral character but the turkey a symbol of courage. Franklin noted in a letter to his daughter that while an eagle would sit lazily and wait for the opportune moment to steal food from an enterprising fishing hawk, a turkey would not hesitate to chase a red coat from the farm yard.

And finally, one last little nugget about the Thanksgiving guest of honor: Many of us late boomers and Gen Xers owe one of our more famous fine feathered friends to turkeydom. Big Bird, who has set an example of confidence, curiosity and kindness on "Sesame Street" for almost 40 years, is an overgrown canary, but his 8 foot-2-inch frame is in fact a collection of the finest dyed, white turkey tail feathers available. Approximately 4,000 of them, that is. According American Plume & Fancy Feather, the company that partially assembles Big Bird's get-up, Sesame Workshop rejects roughly 90 percent of all the feathers selected for use on the costume. Now there's a turkey truth to digest.

Deep-Fried and Delicious

Rarely do we talk about fried foods without a sense of indulgence and guilt — after all, coronary heart disease is a killer, and anything fried must be bad for your health. Not so with this recipe from Paula Deen showcased on the Food Network. Peanut oil is a monounsaturated fat, not a trans fat or saturated fat, and can have a beneficial effect on your health.

The deep-fried turkey is a Southern concept that has become popular across the country. Special care must be used to avoid mishaps with several gallons of hot oil, but the effort is worth it!

For the house seasoning:

- 1 cup salt
- 1/4 cup black pepper
- 1/4 cup garlic powder

Mix ingredients together and store in an airtight container for up to 6 months.

For the turkey:

- 1 (10-pound) turkey
- 2 tablespoons house seasoning (above)
- 2 tablespoons of your favorite dry rub
- 3 to 5 gallons peanut oil

To measure the oil needed, place turkey in fryer, add water to just over the top of the turkey, remove turkey and the water line will indicate how much oil you will need. Having too much oil can cause a fire.

Wash bird inside and out, and allow to drain. Rub turkey all over with house seasoning. Coat turkey with dry rub. Allow the bird to sit until it reaches room temperature.

Heat peanut oil in a turkey fryer or a very, very large stockpot to 350 degrees. Lower turkey into hot oil, very carefully, making sure it is fully submerged.

Fry turkey for 3 minutes per pound plus 5 minutes per bird. Remove turkey from oil and drain on paper towels.

For side items to this dish, visit www.foodnetwork.com.





Photo © 2008 Maren Caruso

Wild Grape Dumplings

Grape dumplings are a favorite among the Choctaw and Cherokee. Cooks may use fresh cultivated Concord grapes and juice to replace the wild grapes, although wild grapes can still be found in the Southeast. Serve dumplings warm with a scoop of ice cream or whipped cream. This recipe serves four and comes from "Foods of the Americas: Native Recipes and Traditions."

- 1 cup unbleached all-purpose flour
- 2 teaspoons baking powder
- 1 ½ teaspoons sugar
- ¼ teaspoon sea or kosher salt
- 2 tablespoons plus 1 ¾ teaspoons unsalted butter
- ¼ cup plus 2 tablespoons milk
- 2 cups grape juice
- 2 cups wild or Concord grapes, seeded
- About 1/3 cup sugar

To prepare the dumplings, combine the flour, baking powder, sugar and salt in a bowl and mix well with a fork. Cut the butter into the flour mixture with the tines of the fork to resemble coarse meal. Stir the milk into the dough. Using your hands, form the dough into a smooth ball.

Lightly flour a work surface and pat the dough into a disk. Sprinkle the dough with a thin coat of flour. Lightly flour a rolling pin and roll out the dough to a thickness of about ¼ inch. Cut the dough into 8 (2-inch) squares, using all of the dough.

To cook the dumplings, combine the grape juice, grapes and sugar in a shallow, wide, heavy pot with a tight-fitting lid. Bring to boil over high heat, then decrease the heat to medium and simmer gently. Taste and add more sugar if the juice is too tart; add a bit of water if it is too sweet. Place the dumplings in the juice, cooking them in batches, if necessary, to avoid overcrowding. Cover the pan tightly, decrease the heat to medium-low, and simmer for 10 to 12 minutes, until the dumplings are plumped and cooked through. Divide the dumplings and juice among individual bowls and serve at once.

Tastes Great, Less Filling

The American bison is still kicking up dust across the American West, and it's making its way onto more dinner plates as the health benefits of buffalo meat are more widely publicized. According to the National Bison Association, bison steaks are the prima donnas of protein, containing less fat per 100 grams than pork, skinless chicken and select cuts of beef — specifically, a paltry 2.42 grams of fat per 100 grams. And bison are nearly always grass fed and free of growth hormones or genetic alterations. It's no wonder that American Indians loved chowing on a buffalo burger back in the days when they were readily available — that is to say, when the number of bison roaming North America was roughly 60 million to 70 million.



Yellowstone National Park offers a sanctuary for bison herds. Several thousand animals live within park boundaries and are often spotted in Hayden Valley along the Yellowstone River.

Today's estimated North American herd size is about 500,000, up considerably from the 1,000 animals that were left standing at the end of the 19th century. (Buffalo Bill Cody reportedly killed 4,280 of the beast just to feed the Kansas Pacific railroad workers, all in 17 months time). While those numbers record the precipitous decimation of the bison herds, they tell little of the effects it had on American aboriginals. Indians relied on the herds not only for food but for hides used in clothing and shelter, rope, toys, cooking vessels, drums, saddles, jewelry and much more than one can imagine. Nothing went to waste. It is not an exaggeration to note that the wild buffalo (academically called bison) was an integral and sacred element in Native culture, and the destruction of the herds coincided with the destruction of the American Indian way of life.

In 1991, Indians created their own organization to help tribes rebuild herd populations on tribal lands. Today, the InterTribal Bison Cooperative has a membership of 57 tribes with a collective herd of more than 15,000. The organization has also implemented a preventative health care initiative that educates Native American families about the benefits of range-fed buffalo meat in the daily diet, a critical mission in light of the diet-related illnesses, such as diabetes and heart disease, that affect tribes.

Bison meat does not have marbling, like beef, and cooks faster than beef. The motto for buffalo cookery is "low and slow." That means if you cook buffalo meat at a lower temperature, you will slow the cooking process and keep the meat from becoming tough.

Tomahawk Bison Steaks

You can substitute buffalo meat in any of your favorite recipes that call for beef. Local grocers often carry this specialty meat or can order it for you.

- 8 ribeye steaks, 10-12 ounces each
- 4 tablespoons olive oil
- 2 tablespoons granulated garlic
- 2 tablespoons Cajun seasoning
- 2 tablespoons cracked black pepper
- 2 tablespoons kosher salt

On a large sheet pan, arrange steaks and rub with olive oil. Mix dry ingredients and season steaks on both sides. Blacken in a cast-iron skillet or grill on a wood-fired grill until desired temperature is reached.



Sky City



San Esteban del Rey Church and Convent, Acoma Pueblo

For nearly 1,000 years, the magnetism of Acoma Pueblo in New Mexico has held the Acoma tribe with the sheer energy of its topography. Soaring heavenward about 370 feet, the pueblo is a collection of some 300 multilevel adobe structures that crown a sheer-walled sandstone mesa. The village appears not so much the massive construction project of ancient peoples who had to scale steep rock walls as an instant sprinkling of simple civilization from above.

When the Spaniards came upon the Acoma Pueblo in the 1500s, they marveled at its fortress-like seclusion—the Acoma had positioned themselves in a towering community virtually inaccessible to raiders. Setting eyes upon the sacred bastion four centuries later, journalist Charles Lummis described it as “so unearthly beautiful, so weird, so unique, that it is hard for the onlooker to believe himself in America, or upon this dull planet at all.”

But this is not strictly a historical archeological site. What makes the pueblo perhaps more notable than the resolve required to build such a citadel, or even its stark beauty, is its status as North America’s longest continuously inhabited settlement. Acoma Pueblo is still the sacred center of this ancient people. Between seven and 12 Acoma families, numbering about 30 people, still make these ancestral dwellings of adobe their permanent homes, and each of the tribe’s 6,000 members, most of whom live on the 600-square-mile reservation that surrounds the mesa, is related to at least one pueblo household. Each summer when school ends, families migrate to this village in the sky, and many tribal members come “home” each weekend for Acoma religious ceremonies. Eight annual festivals draw tribal pilgrims (and visitors) into the settlement to feast with friends and family on native dishes like green-chili stew with lamb, fresh corn and wheat pudding, and Acoma horno bread pulled fresh and fragrant from outdoor adobe ovens.

Acoma Pueblo is a national treasure as Macchu Picchu is to Peru and the Mayan ruins are to Guatemala, but this treasure is alive. The significance of this fact is evident everywhere atop the mesa. It forms the walls of the pueblo buildings. It is in the highly prized Acoma pottery that tribal women still create by coiling, as their matriarchs have for centuries. In fact, these artists still hand-grind the shards of clay pots hundreds of years old, add them to the clay to bind and strengthen it. In essence, the pots are vessels for not only water and grains but for history and place as well.

To tour Acoma Pueblo, which is a National Trust Historic Site and a registered National Historical Landmark, or to simply learn more, visit www.skycity.com.

Pottery from Acoma Pueblo



Going Native at Rushmore

There aren’t any signs pointing Mount Rushmore visitors to the newest exhibit. Superintendent Gerard Baker prefers that visitors explore the national memorial’s grounds and discover the Native American heritage village on their own. He isn’t going to tell them what to think of it, either. “How do you interpret sacred geography? We don’t have that much time,” Baker said, referring to the tourists who visit Rushmore, but then, tapping their watches, eagerly move on to Crazy Horse or Dairy Queen. “I want people to leave this park with more questions than answers.”



Photo © 2008 Maren Caruso

Heritage Village, which opened this summer, is a cluster of tipis off the Presidential Trail walkway where Native Americans work as cultural interpreters, practicing traditional arts and answering visitors’ questions about their history and community. Baker certainly has some local people raising questions about what he is doing with the Mount Rushmore site.

No one questions whether an education in Native history is important for Black Hills visitors, but they dispute that it belongs at Rushmore. Comments like these bother Baker, who like many Native Americans, has a complicated relationship with the monument and the government, which in this case is his employer. Baker said he is always trying to learn more about Washington, Jefferson, Lincoln and Theodore Roosevelt, reading books about their lives and studying their thoughts and philosophies. “This should be a place for people to come and reflect on who you are as an American,” he said. When he hears the criticism, he thinks: “Hey, it’s America. That’s the joy of the freedoms here,” that people can speak their minds.

This isn’t the first National Parks position in which Baker has introduced a Native perspective. Baker generated controversy while working at the former Custer National Battlefield. He became superintendent shortly after Congress changed the name to the Little Bighorn National Battlefield and ordered the construction of an “Indian Memorial,” both unpopular among Custer buffs. Baker moved to include Native perspective through events like a Wipe Away the Tears healing ceremony and a controversial ceremony during the 120th anniversary of the battle.

“I’ve always tried wherever I’m at to bring in the concept of the American Indian,” he said. Baker said he has been fortunate to have had the support of National Park Service officials, who are trying around the country to expand the number of stories and viewpoints shared at parks and monuments. Patty Rooney, a spokeswoman for the National Park Service’s Midwest region, thinks the heritage village “very much” belongs at Rushmore. If he is turning some people off, Baker said, he is turning others on to Rushmore’s message. It’s clear from spending time with Baker at the memorial that visitors hunger for information about Native Americans.

Excerpted with permission from “Does Native American exhibit belong at Mount Rushmore?” by Barbara Soderlin. Full story at www.rapidcityjournal.com.

On the Cover: Top, “Orca and Baby” by Marvin Oliver; center left, freshly cooked bread from Acoma Pueblo; center right, Tomahawk Bison Steak; bottom left, Heritage Village at Mount Rushmore; bottom right, “Protectors” by Arnold Isbister.

Unity is a celebration of the food, art and culture of diverse communities throughout North America. Published seven times per year, its stories are positive, inspiring and offer new perspectives on America’s changing culture. Unity is exclusively distributed to clients of Thompson Hospitality and Compass Group, both leaders in foodservice who are proud to serve you. For more information about Unity, or to offer feedback or suggest story ideas, send an e-mail to unity@thompsonhospitality.com.

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